



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

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January 14, 2011

Governor's Office, Mike Volesky; (e-mail)  
Environmental Quality Council, Maureen Theisen, (e-mail)  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Tom Ellerhof, (e-mail)  
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MT Historical Society, SHIPO, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202  
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620  
Montana Wildlife Federation; Craig Sharpe (e-mail)  
Montana Audubon; Janet Ellis (e-mail)  
Montana Environmental Information Center; meic@meic.org  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Jim Williams, John Fraley and Kevin Frey (e-mail)  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Dale Becker (e-mail)  
Other

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has released a Decision Notice for an Environmental Assessment (EA) regarding a proposal to grant funds to the town of Hot Springs to build a shooting range. The range will be located approximately 3 miles from the town of Hot Springs and about 1 mile from Highway 28 on Little Bitterroot Road. This project will provide \$54,701 of partial funding to build a shooting range. The following items are to be accomplished to complete this proposed project: a) build earthworks; b) construct shooting stations; c) purchase & assemble targets; d) design and build an area for clay pigeon shooting; d) design and make a paintball course; e) make an area for Airsoft equipment; f) erect an outhouse; g) pour sidewalks; and h) clear and gravel parking lot.

The Draft EA was posted on FWP's web site and the comment period ran from July 7, 2010 to July 30, 2010. A news release was distributed from the FWP Region 1 Information Officer and a legal ad ran in the *Sanders County Ledger* newspaper.

**Comment Summary:** FWP received 3 comments: one supportive of the project; and two comments from wildlife professionals representing FWP and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (CSKT). These biologists expressed concerns that the construction of a paintball range has the potential to attract area bears to the range, which can lead to a human safety issue. FWP has been involved with an incidence of bears being attracted to spent paintballs at a range in Big Sky, Montana this past year.

In reviewing the rules governing the shooting grants program (87-2-276 through 279 MCA), section 87-1-278(6) states *“To be eligible for grant assistance, the applicant shall allow safe shooting of hunting arms. Hunting arms include shotguns, archery equipment, black powder arms, rifles, and pistols.”* FWP has determined Airsoft and paintball firearms do not meet the definition of hunting arms and do not qualify for this grant program.

Based on the comments and concerns from FWP and CSKT wildlife professionals regarding the paintball range and the determination noted above, FWP plans to approve grant funds to the town of Hot Springs for the shooting range element except the paintball range and Airsoft area. Therefore, the total amount of the grant will be reduced to \$53,500.

FWP encourages the town of Hot Springs to explore mitigation options with the Regional FWP Wildlife Manager and the CSKT Bear Biologist in reference to pursuing construction of a paintball range.

With this decision the Draft EA is now final. Funding for this proposed project is approved and the project will proceed once other administrative responsibilities required by the grant program are completed.

Sincerely,

Signed copy on file

Kurt Cunningham  
Shooting Range Grant Coordinator